

First Presbyterian Church of Santa Rosa

A place to BELONG, BELIEVE and LOVE like Jesus



Mission Study September 2023

“We are a community of faith and love, hope and witness, joined with Christ. We are a vibrant, diverse group of people who are excited to worship and serve the Lord. We truly want to live out our faith, serving God in all areas of life. May it be evident, through this document, that we are seeking God. We are examining our past and we call upon God, with all our hearts, to lead us forward.”



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Executive Summary

This 2023 study was taken by the Session of First Presbyterian Church Santa Rosa. It draws on listening sessions with our congregation and a written congregation-wide survey, as well as the input of many staff and Session members. Its purpose is to provide a snapshot of our church, assessing its strengths, weaknesses and challenges, while accurately describing who we are and what we do.

Most crucially, our study finds that “members of First Presbyterian Church agree on what our church does well and what it should do well. Biblical teaching and preaching are of first importance to us; worship and pastoral care come close behind.”

We have many assets, most notably an excellent, spacious building, a skilled and dedicated staff, a history of outstanding pastoral leadership, many diverse and well-functioning programs for all ages, and a happy and loving congregation. We also face significant challenges, as the effects of multiple firestorms in our community and of COVID continue to be felt. Our congregation is smaller and older as a result. Absent greater giving, we will have to reduce staff, a prospect that is painful. Nevertheless, we find that our members love their church and are optimistic regarding its future.

Mission/Vision Statement

We are a place to belong, believe and love like Jesus.

In Sonoma County

The famous horticulturist Luther Burbank has been quoted as saying, “Sonoma County is the chosen spot of all the earth as far as nature is concerned.” Members and friends of our congregation echo these thoughts about our home, describing it as, “a glorious place to see the creation of God.” It offers access to “cathedral-like redwood forests” and the wild Pacific Ocean, displaying “stunning vistas” of hills, valleys, and vineyards. Quite simply, it is the “best place on earth!” And while there is undeniable beauty all around our county, the true beauty is present “...in those who call it home.” We count life in this place a blessing.



Our church is situated in the heart of this beautiful county of Sonoma, in Santa Rosa, a casual and inviting city of 175,000. Though Santa Rosa was ravaged by catastrophic firestorms for several years beginning in the fall of 2017, nearly all the destruction has been rebuilt and a casual observer might never notice the scars. Our city features an attractive downtown, historic residential neighborhoods, arts and culture, an outstanding food scene, world-renowned wineries and brew pubs, and many wonderful, diverse churches, one of which is First Presbyterian Church.

Sonoma County is not a perfect place: we struggle with many problems, most notably homelessness, crime, mental illness, and racism, among others. Nor are we First Presbyterians perfect people who possess all the answers to our county’s problems. We are, however, rooted in this place, and it is here that we are called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ.

First Presbyterian Church has been an important and active part of this community for over 150 years, holding its first worship service in 1855, and moving to our present location in 1951. Our neighborhood is a short walk from downtown, across the street from a small shopping center, and surrounded by lovely, well-maintained homes. Our church is a place to worship, but also a place to learn, serve, make friends and connect. We pray that people will come and feel like they belong. We pray that they will want to join us in worshipping God and serving our neighbors.

Our Identity

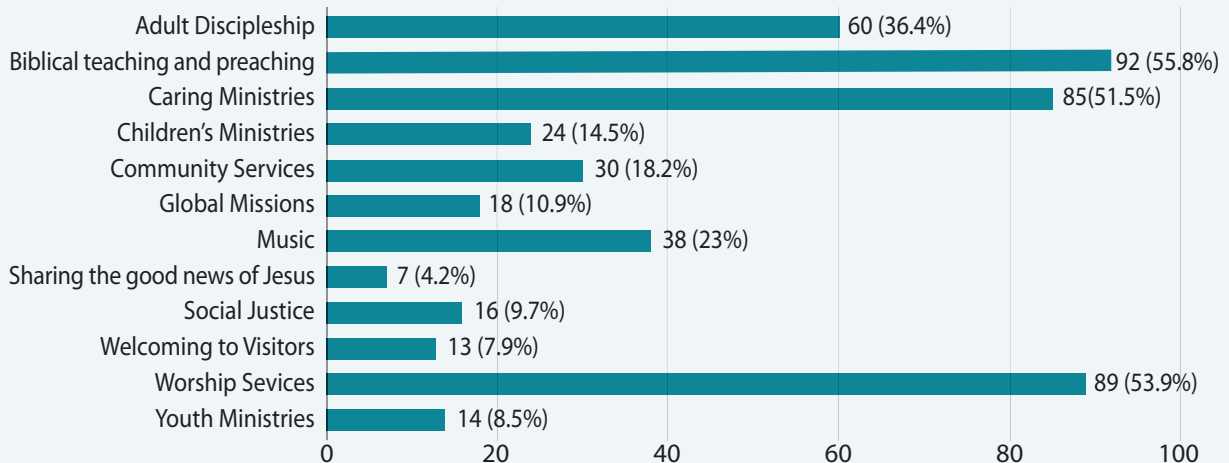


In late spring, 2022, as we emerged from Covid, we held listening groups in which members and friends of the church weighed in on the challenges ahead. Discussions about our identity and our direction took place in Session and in working groups planning for change. In 2023, we used a short written survey to gather information from a broader cross-section of our congregation. The survey was a chance for every member to speak up about what First Presbyterian is and what it should be. One hundred and sixty five people participated, from all age groups.

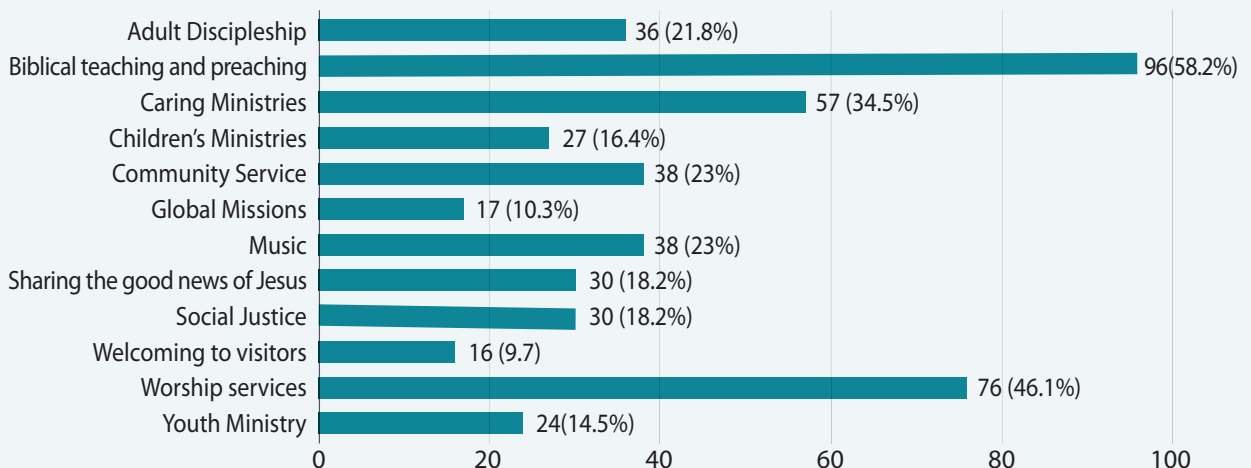
The survey showed remarkable agreement:

FPC Church Survey Responses – June 2023

What do you consider to be the three strongest ministries of our church?
(Choose only 3) 165 responses



Which of these ministries of our church matter most to you?
(Choose only 3) 165 responses



Members of First Presbyterian Church agree on what our church does well and what it *should* do well. Biblical teaching and preaching are of first importance to us; worship and pastoral care come close behind.

To interpret: we see our primary witness as simply being the church of Jesus Christ: a congregation that gathers to learn and grow from God's Word and to worship him; a welcoming community that cares for each other. Week by week, year by year, we endeavor to live as the Bible teaches us: loving God, in service to others. That is our primary witness.

In the words of members of our congregation:

"We are a community of faith and love, hope and witness, and are joined with Christ, and one with all." Also, "we are a vibrant, diverse group of people who are excited to worship and serve the Lord." The congregation is "warm, caring, sincere, thoughtful in teaching, committed to truth, and authentic in faith."

The heart of our identity is displayed every Sunday morning when we gather to worship. It does not end there, of course: we are involved in global mission and local community service. Racial and social justice are important to us, and we look for ways to express our faith in making our community a more just place. We partner with missionaries around the world, as well as with local organizations that care for the underserved.

Once again, in the words of members of our congregation:

People "truly want to live out their faith; it is not just a routine of gathering on Sundays, but a larger calling of how to serve God in all areas of life." This was proven when "Session supported the Anti-Racism and Social Justice goal." It shows in "how we speak often of missions - both in the world and locally." People in First Presbyterian Church are connected through "creative ways like art, nature activities, movie nights, and shared meals."



The Challenges



COVID affected our church deeply. Responding to county-wide health imperatives, we stopped worshiping in person early in 2020 and substituted virtual worship services. The church building was off-limits for all intents and purposes, and our many programs abruptly halted or shifted to meeting virtually. Small groups, committees and other activities continued through Zoom.

After a full year of missing each other, we slowly returned to in-person worship. Even then, many members remained hesitant to meet in person; some groups continued to meet virtually.

It was apparent that we could not simply pick up where we left off. COVID had changed our church. That called us to a time of reassessment. We needed to and wanted to recommit ourselves. We sought to move forward rather than trying to recreate our past. God's resources had not diminished, and we were still committed to the call of loving Jesus and serving our neighbor. But we needed to re-think.

“We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” (Ephesians 4:15b-16)

To this end, a group of leaders was called to facilitate ideas and suggestions under the title *Leading Through Change Working Group*. This collection of dedicated people met numerous times. They presented their discoveries and ideas to Session, and, with Session's approval, a Mission Study Task Force was formed in order to reflect on the changes, challenges, and opportunities First Presbyterian Church had experienced since the last Mission Study was written in 2013. This document is one result of that task force's work.



Some of our changes and challenges include:

Natural Disaster

The Northern California firestorm of 2017 destroyed the homes of over 60 families from our church. Two more major fires followed in the next three years, causing additional members to lose their homes. Our church rose to the challenge, temporarily housing people, providing financial support, and offering ongoing emotional, spiritual, and physical care. As a result of losing homes, several members left the area to restart elsewhere or to be near family. Some of us experienced significant trauma that still affects us today.

Response to racism

After the murder of George Floyd in 2021, our Session moved to support a two-year focus on Anti-racism and Social Justice. A task force of ten people (pastors, elders, members and friends) was formed to encourage, support, and educate any who were interested in seeking what Jesus would have us do about racial injustice. This emphasis was welcomed by many, but others questioned whether it might be more political than worshipful. Ultimately, some members left our fellowship.

Response to the pandemic

To protect our congregation during the pandemic while following county health guidelines, Session stopped in-person worship and instead created an online worship opportunity. When we at last re-opened in-person worship, the number of worshippers was limited, and masks were required. Those with compromised immune systems often stayed home, as did those who did not want to wear masks. Some members who disagreed with Session's decisions made the choice to worship elsewhere.

Financial Changes impacting our Future

Due to repeated firestorms and demographic change in our county, we experienced a slow decline in membership. COVID accelerated that. We found ourselves with many fewer members and friends. Thanks to the government Employee Retention Program, we were able to retain our staff and continue our ministries through 2020 and 2021 with minimal change. To our surprise giving actually increased in 2022. That allowed us to go into 2023 with our programs intact and with more equitable pay for our staff.

We are closely monitoring our contributions for 2023. Any decline could require substantial cuts in 2024, affecting staff and program.

An aging congregation

Undeniably, our congregation is aging, and younger members are not joining in adequate numbers to replace them. While we have built high-quality youth and children's programs, attendance is small. We recognize that our current makeup is unsustainable in the long run. We do not want to surrender to these trends, and we are searching for answers.

Moving Toward a Mission Study

Given these challenging circumstances, the Mission Study Task Force set up monthly meetings to consider feedback received from the congregation through opportunities created by *The Leading Through Change Working Group*. Those opportunities included:

Listening Groups

During Sunday mornings in May and June of 2022, members and friends were encouraged to attend a Listening Group. A past or present member of Session facilitated each group and solicited responses to identical questions regarding the church's strengths and challenges.

Specific Questions sent to several members and/or friends

A set of identical questions (centered around what makes our church great, what changes may be important, and where folks see our church in 5 to 10 years) was sent to a small, diverse group of individuals. The responses were summarized and included in this study. Suggestions and criticisms were forwarded to Session.

Church Leadership Gathering

All church leaders were invited to gather in September, 2022, to be informed about important initiatives in response to topics raised by the listening groups, to engage one another, encourage conversation and sharing, and help connect more people to service opportunities.

Congregational Survey

In order to hear from as many members and friends of our congregation as possible, we initiated a brief written survey. It included multiple-choice questions about what ministries we do well and what ministries matter most, as well as a question about what qualities matter most in a pastor. Open-ended, write-in questions were also given, so that any kind of complaint, praise or advice could be included and forwarded to Session. The response was robust, with about half the active congregation completing a survey.

The Mission Study

When reviewing information from our members and friends, The Mission Study Task Force identified six themes of particular significance:

- Communication
- Missions: Local and Global
- Hospitality
- Social Justice and Anti-Racism
- Church Life and Programs
- Technology

Communication

Members and friends of our congregation expressed frustration that, due to COVID, we had lost connection with each other. Having not seen each other, many felt they didn't know other members well. Furthermore, better communication about the life of the church was needed. Members and friends expressed a desire for more transparent, regular communication regarding church life opportunities and needs for service.

Session has begun to respond to this need:

To foster greater unity, a combined fellowship/worship service was offered on the 5th Sunday in October, 2022. The entire congregation—children, youth and adults—came together. Breakfast was served at 9:30, followed by a single worship service which allowed everyone to fellowship and worship together. It was a joyous event, allowing us to engage across generations and strengthen our unity. Such gatherings have occurred quarterly since then. They are known as One Church Sundays.



In addition to *FPC Information and Sunday Reminders*, a weekly email communication, we now publish a paper monthly newsletter, *FPC Connection*. Copies are available throughout the month at the Connect Center and are posted online.

A live-screen in the narthex, in the sanctuary before worship, and at the east entrance to the church scrolls continuously with opportunities for service and upcoming events and programs.

A Technology Team has begun the process of refreshing our website, making it more useful, and increasing our use of social media.

We continue to offer virtual meetings for a variety of events, in combination with in-person gatherings.

Hospitality

Comments regarding hospitality are easily summed up as ‘a need for a welcoming, open church where people are greeted in whatever door they enter.’ Coming back into the church building post-COVID created anxiety for many. Our volunteer teams of welcomers were depleted and needed revitalization. Now greeters, part of a Welcome Team, staff each entrance to the church so people are immediately greeted with a smile and ‘hello.’ The Connect Center, staffed by friendly folks, offers answers to questions; direction to children, youth, and adult classes; and opportunities for people to volunteer. Announcements are shown on screens in the narthex and in the sanctuary before service begins so that folks are able to see opportunities for involvement.



Special cross-generational events for our youth are being planned. The emphasis is getting kids excited about church and Jesus. A modified Mexico Mission Trip—traditionally an important part of our youth ministry—took place in the spring of 2023. Such activities help youth feel that they have an important place at church.

One aspect of hospitality is an attractive, clean, well-cared-for facility. We have a large and graceful building that offers multiple large meeting spaces, many classrooms and offices. Our outside space includes a sizeable lawn, a stone patio, a rose garden and cupola. Such properties require considerable maintenance and updating. The building and grounds team of our Session is embarked on a long-term, strategic refreshing of our facility, inside and out.

We also host the Presbyterian Preschool in our building. It welcomes and serves families, whether or not they are part of our congregation.

Church Life and Programs

Staff:

First Presbyterian Church has a full-time **Pastor** and a part-time **Associate Pastor**. They jointly plan and lead Sunday morning worship, care for the needs of the members of our congregation, lead various groups and committees, and provide leadership for all staff. Another gifted, retired pastor volunteers his time for both leading worship and teaching Adult Bible classes.



Recently our long-term **Director of Caring Ministries** was ordained to **Minister of Congregational Life and Care**. She oversees the Deacons, Stephen Ministry and care for our congregation, including hospital visits. A **Director of Adult Discipleship** oversees our small groups, the Adult Discipleship Committee, and the popular Adult Discipleship classes offered throughout the year.

We are an aging church, with an average age of 60-70 years. High housing prices have made our county a difficult environment for young families; and all over America churches' hold on young people has diminished. However, we refuse to give up the younger generation. Though the number of our youth and children has decreased, we have a full-time **Director of Youth Ministry**, a part-time **Director of Children's Ministries**, and a part-time **Children's Ministries Assistant**. We also support youth interns. Recently, we have seen a small but significant growth in these departments.

Our outstanding Music Team includes a **Worship Music Director**, a **Choral Music Director** and an **Organist**, in addition to other musicians. A worship planning team meets weekly to coordinate our worship experience through music, prayer, liturgy and preaching.

We have restructured our administrative staff to better reflect the needs of our church and relieve the Pastors from administrative functions. The reorganized positions are:

Church Administrator — a full-time role responsible for managing all aspects of the church's administrative infrastructure. This role ensures the church's smooth and efficient operation of daily activities and business processes.

Communications Specialist – a part-time role responsible for developing and implementing FPC’s communication/marketing strategies both for our congregation and the external community. Primary focus will be to enhance and optimize all communication platforms such as our FPC website and social media presence.

Accounting Assistant – a part-time role to support the Church Administrator in performing recurring financial tasks, such as processing accounts payable, recording donations, reporting functions and assisting with the annual budget process.

Programs for Children:

Sunday Mornings

During the 9:00 service, Children’s Church is offered exclusively to pre-school children. It includes free play, Bible stories and crafts.

During the 10:30 service, Children’s Church is provided for infants to 6th grade. Infants and toddlers are cared for in a well-equipped nursery. Preschool children enjoy the same activities mentioned above. Elementary-aged kids participate in a large group setting to hear an interactive Bible story and small groups for conversation, application, and prayer.

Events and Programs

Children’s Ministries supports parents in the discipleship of their children by providing weekly devotions, cues for faith conversations, and meaningful at-home activities.



EPIC, our preteen youth group, meets monthly to play games, eat pizza, and hear a Bible lesson designed to launch meaningful discussions about faith.

Social events for families are offered throughout the year. In the summer, we ramp up events for families to enable generations to meet and learn together. In the fall, we gather for a harvest party and present our second graders with their very own Bibles. In winter, families and the larger church body come together to make Advent wreaths. Kids tell the Christmas story in a traditional Christmas pageant during the Children’s Christmas Eve service. We also host a game night. Springtime brings an Easter egg hunt and Lenten activities.



Programs for Youth:

Sunday Mornings

During the 10:30 service, Sunday School is offered to middle schoolers and high schoolers. It is a time where we work to remove barriers that can prevent us from experiencing God. We listen, sing, pray, laugh, and learn.

Events and Programs

Granite is our middle school youth group which meets to experience fun, friends, laughter, videos, music, and relevant messages from God's word. Decade, our high school youth group, meets together to hear a message, interact, and wrestle with God's truth.



Students in both groups meet weekly in small groups to connect on a deeper level with each other, with their adult leaders, and with God.

Additionally, they each have opportunities to engage in service throughout the year, at both the local and global level. The annual Mexico Mission trip, paused during COVID, has started again. It is a major emphasis for growth and service among our high school students.

Programs for Adults

Disciples are learners and Christian discipleship means becoming an apprentice of Jesus, orienting the whole of oneself around his life, teachings and actions. Our team has identified five ways to focus the work of this ministry to engage, challenge and encourage apprenticeship.

Christian Spiritual Formation

Soul Training workshops, Apprentice groups, the Difference course.

Small Group Bible Studies

Many groups meet for Bible study in homes as well as in our church building.



Biblical Teaching

Classes such as the Sunday morning Adult Education class (concurrent with our worship services) and special events such as the speaker/author series. Our church library acquires and circulates books both scholarly and general that support growing in biblical understanding.

Mentorship

One-on-one pairings to encourage spiritual growth and accountability.



Faith Meets the World

Our summer guest lecture series EnlightenUp, Movie Nights (viewing and discussion of contemporary films), Connecting Through Nature (hikes, birdwatching, stargazing, etc.) and Dinners for 7 or 8.

Ongoing Events

Our programs and social gatherings are confidently making their way back into church life. Opportunities include:

- Caregiving groups:
 - Caregivers Support groups (virtual and in-person, men’s and mixed)
 - DivorceCare
 - GriefShare
 - Military
 - Friendly Visitor
 - Homebound Communion
- Pastor’s classes between services;
- Presbyterian Women (a women’s group for all ages that meets weekly for fellowship, speakers, creating handmade projects, lunch and Biblical teaching);
- Parish gatherings to connect churchgoers with their deacons;
- Musical opportunities to sing in our choir and ring with our bell choir;
- ‘The Gallery’ (a showcase for local artists).



World Musical Premiere

One of the happiest events of 2023 came about through the generous legacy of a long-term choir member. His will enabled us to commission an original choral work by composer Alan Petker, *Dona Nobis Pacem*. After six months of rehearsals and with the help of an 18-piece orchestra we presented the world premiere of this piece to a standing-room-only crowd. The work, whose texts emphasized social justice themes, reached beyond our congregation to a wide audience of friends and neighbors. An offering was taken for Catholic Charities, the leading agency in Sonoma County offering support to underserved people. Over \$4,000 was given.

Missions: Local and Global

For decades we have prayerfully and financially supported missionaries and their call to serve, both globally and locally. First Presbyterian Church is known for giving generously of time, food and finances. This is reflected in our operating budget which allocates 11% of all general operating donations to missions. We have an active Mission Committee, and we pray specifically for one of our Mission partners each Sunday during worship services. When these mission partners are in town, we host welcoming luncheons and provide them with a platform to share all that the Lord is doing through them to share Christ's love around the world.

We enthusiastically support local missions both financially and in terms of mobilizing volunteers. Our partners are the Redwood Gospel Mission, The Living Room, Catholic Charities, Presbyterian Preschool, Westminster Woods, FISH, and Juvenile Hall Ministries. In partnership with the Redwood Gospel Mission, we continue to participate as hosts in the Nomadic Shelter, where we provide a home-cooked dinner, fellowship, and shelter to unhoused individuals each month in Ingram Hall.



Social Justice and Anti-Racism



In response to one of the greatest moral challenges of our time, a group of leaders in our church formed the Anti-Racism and Social Justice Team. A majority of the congregation supported this endeavor, and were challenged to take at least one class, or read one book, or participate in one discussion group on the topic. Our pastor offered Session the same challenge. The Anti-Racism team hosted many group discussions and educational events.

In addition, the Anti-Racism and Racial Justice Team hosted a community-wide forum with the candidates for county sheriff. Police violence has been an area of concern in our community. The forum reminded our community that the election of a sheriff has important consequences for racial justice; and reminded both candidates and voters that people of faith have valuable perspectives. The church did not endorse any candidate but offered an opportunity for all candidates to answer questions and share their points of view. They were asked questions from a faith perspective, and some offered testimony to their own personal faith. The forum was well received, and we hope to provide more avenues for people to learn and voice concerns for our community through civic engagement.

Because we chose to engage in the contentious topic of racism, we did receive some push back. Despite attempts to be inclusive and non-threatening, some people expressed discomfort with our approach. While we want to be a church that draws people in, our goal is not to make everyone feel comfortable but to be a church that is alive to the world, involved in our community and helping the hungry and marginalized around us. We will continue to work towards creating a safe place where honest discussions can happen. We will model listening and loving, respecting the opinions of others, while prayerfully considering how Jesus would want us to support those in need.

Technology

During the pandemic, our church went online in order to stay connected while in-person gatherings were suspended. Although the online worship began out of necessity, it was very well received. Many folks welcomed the opportunity to worship how and when they wanted. Still, some people – like those who are older, who have limited tech skills, or who have limited access to technology – were feeling left behind. Also, the format needed some updating to help the flow of worship and lessen workload on the pastors and staff. Session recognized the need to radically upgrade our technology to better communicate and expand our congregation's reach. A Technology Team began working together to explore the potential of this new form, connecting worshippers not only in Sonoma County, but around the world.

Live streaming was launched, and virtual worshippers acknowledged and welcomed during each service. This provided an avenue for online worshippers to feel included in the larger body of worshippers. It also reminded in-person worshippers that, although not seen, the virtual worshippers are still indeed part of the greater church. In short, it united our divided church body. Live streaming also eased staff workload and allowed our church services to be accessible via YouTube. This is all thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers that gave much time and talent.



Concluding Thoughts

In Jeremiah 29:11, the Lord declares to Israel that He has plans for a hopeful future. We believe this to be true for us. Our hope is not in the fact that we are an established and well-known church in the community. Neither is it in our beautiful facility with space for all. Rather our hope is in Immanuel, the God who is with us. As God's promises continue in Jeremiah chapter 29, "...you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." May it be evident, through this document, that we are seeking God. We are examining our past and we call upon God, with all our hearts, to lead us forward. We trust in God's timing, strength and care, and we surrender First Presbyterian Church of Santa Rosa as a tool to bring the message of salvation and God's love to any and all within reach. We will listen to what God wants us to be for His church, and we will have faith and comfort knowing God leads us, God hears us, and God has great plans for us.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church."
(Ephesians 3:20-21)

~ *Amen.*

Comments from our survey:

In what ways do we live up to our vision?

“ In all ways, by welcoming unhoused people, by supporting missions, by reaching out to people in need. All the things Christian churches should be doing.

I feel the pastor, other church leaders & members show and practice all three visions daily. I feel the variety of activities & learning are above par in this church! So many dedicated individuals working and showing the love of Jesus!

Very welcoming to new members and very friendly staff.

Lots of ways for people to contribute. We care about the elderly and provide various care paths. Many class choices and ways to come together in fellowship.

That we even have the conversation about this and go back to our vision frequently helps us strive for this. There's a lot of connection here with the breakfast, small groups, dinners for 7/8, movie nights. These are things we can invite others to or connect with each other outside the worship hour.

Our church accepts people as they are, so one can choose to belong so long as one shows up to participate. Our caring ministries program is unequalled. We have Biblical preaching and strong discipleship opportunities. We reach out in community service, social justice, and global mission areas. In this way we help people believe and learn to love like Jesus. Our worship is active and glorifies God.

There are many parts of our church that people can get involved with. Everyone has an opportunity to belong not only to the congregation at large but also to a smaller group (i.e. Bible study, choir, kids program, etc.)

We are all about a place to believe. Our belief in Jesus as the Son of God unites us as a family. The classes, adult discipleship and kids' programs lead into a place to believe.

Freedom and respect -- There's a spirit of unity here despite a wide diversity of theological views and the freedom to express them.

I think our church is very welcoming and provides numerous ways to feel like you belong to the church family...the social time after worship and One Church breakfasts are examples. Our church has also helped me “believe”/ grow my faith through meaningful sermons, praise music, adult Sunday classes, Apprenticeship Immersion, advent series on breaking down barriers, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Evensong services. Finally, I feel like our church is very good about providing multiple ways to “love like Jesus” through community and church service – deacons, supporting missionaries, Nomadic Shelter, gift tree at Christmas, gathering school supplies for Gospel Mission’s backpack give-away, concert fundraiser for Catholic Charities, social justice initiatives, etc.

Although we always can be better at it, we create a place where people feel welcome and want to be here. It is getting stronger after the COVID years. Our church is a special place to be – you can feel it. Bible support is so helpful – The verse to memorize (with the bookmark!) and the Lenten booklet were stellar this year. It is obvious there is a dedicated desire to build our church and the work is being done – starting with the Listening Groups. This shows positive steps and that folks CARE! That is a strong message from strong, faithful believers.

We have a close sense of community. Our support of the firestorm survivors was outstanding.

In almost everything the church does one can see that the vision, or mission statement, is the guiding force. But like with so many other churches, our whole society is dealing with forces in our current culture that no longer value being a part of a church. Adjusting to those societal issues is a huge challenge for the pastors and Session.

Opening our eyes to Social Justice issues and how we can work toward reducing racism has helped me Love Like Jesus by looking at people in ways that He does, at the heart, not the outside packaging.

FPC is very welcoming overall. The updates to the sanctuary are wonderful (the screens are beautiful and easy to keep the church members active in the worship)... and I love to see the cross at the front, not covered by a screen through much of the service.

Delivering meals to parishioners shows our love for one another.

As a new member to FPC, I especially have experienced the belonging and the love. The congregation and staff are responsible for my/our feeling welcomed and loved.

I have believed and belonged here since I was 8 years old. I choose to continue here because our leaders and elected church leaders are always trying new ways to bring more to believe and belong here too. Music isn't my choice anymore but pray it is appealing to more new people.

Some people are following this idea with action. Some are not.

The classes/programs/groups offer varying levels of participation and learning. Which is good. Each person is different in how deep they want to dive in or maybe only has the time (or courage) for a little. Our leadership staff is wonderful. All of them have a light that just shines out the love of Jesus. And our music is the best!!!

I do really feel like I belong to a family.

First Pres. is a place I call home, where I am welcomed and accepted for who I am. At the same time, I am also challenged in my beliefs through discussions, studies, sermons, speakers, and friends within the church. Lastly, I have known the deep love of Christ through the deep caring I and my family have received over the years. Throughout the time of raising children, surgeries, the Tubbs fire, and death of parents -- we have been loved and cared for well by the staff of this church (especially Dale) and this body.

I have never felt more comfortable or welcome than at this church. During the time when I was ill I was not forgotten and many prayed for me. That is something that I have never forgotten and will carry with me always.

I especially appreciate that we make an effort to include the home-bound members of our congregation.

You are open to accepting anybody into this church, regardless of their faith, sexual orientation, and race. These values are what drive youth away from churches. Knowing there is a place where we are accepted, that makes this church so great.

I do see and feel a strong desire amongst the leadership and church community to put this vision into practice. I see dedication and love in the way people are serving others both inside and outside of the church, and a commitment to creating welcoming spaces for people to belong.

I appreciate that a diverse spectrum of ways to be a Christian exists here.

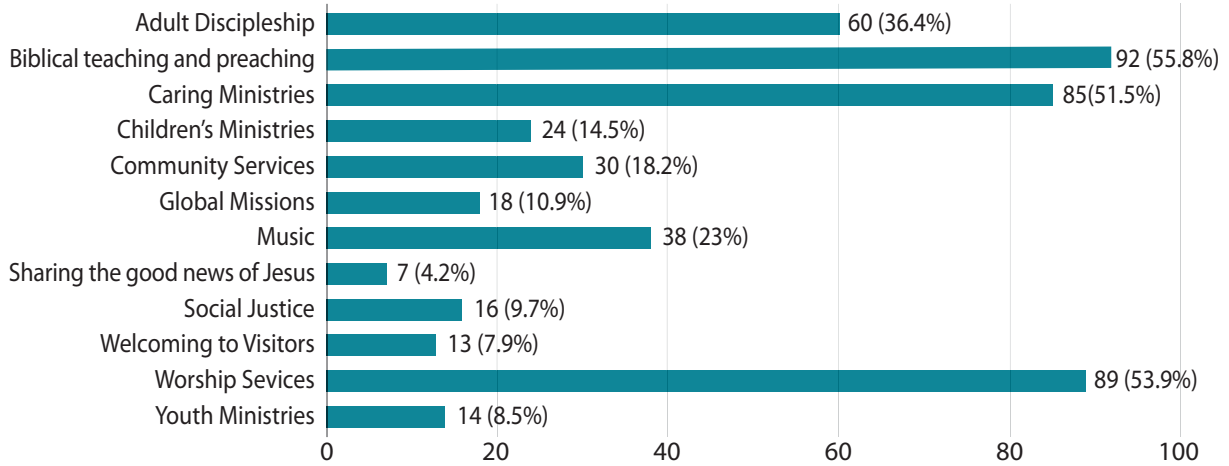
Other suggestions and criticisms were forwarded directly to Session.



FPC Church Survey Responses – June 2023

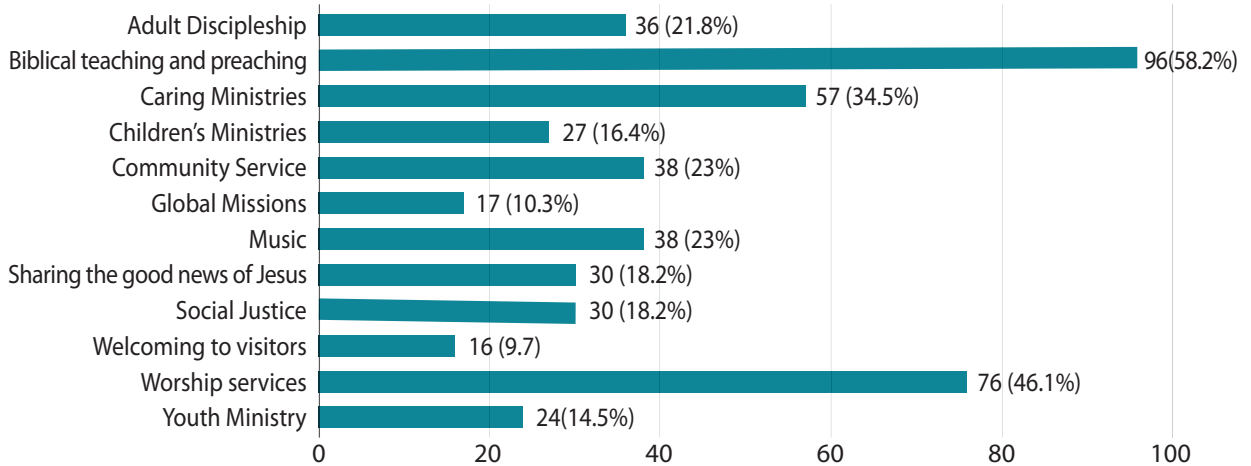
What do you consider to be the three strongest ministries of our church?

(Choose only 3) 165 responses



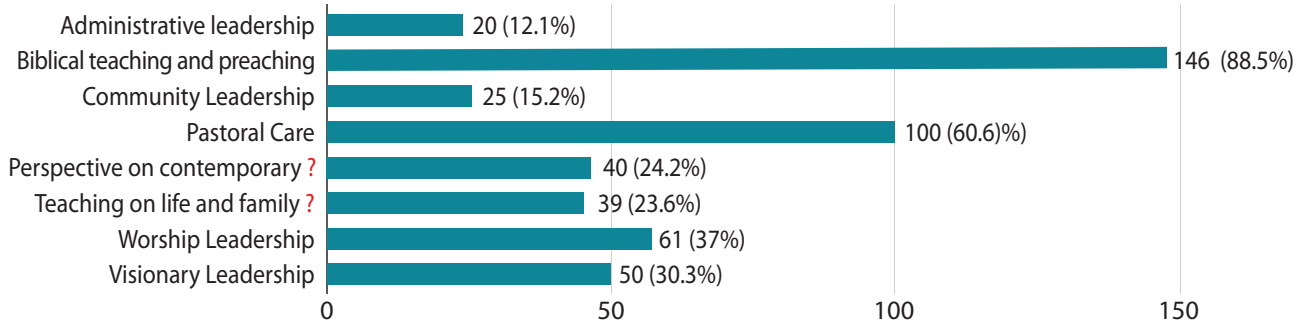
Which of these ministries of our church matter most to you?

(Choose only 3) 165 responses



What qualities do you value most in a pastor?

(Choose only 3) 165 responses



Summary of Responses to All Church Survey Question 1:

Our vision for First Presbyterian Church of Santa Rosa is: “A Place to Belong, Believe and Love Like Jesus”. In what ways do we live up to this?

138 responses

Topic	# of responses	Feedback
Welcoming	51	Love the greeters, leaders’ warmth in worship, welcome cards, greeting each other
Many ways to connect	42	One Church meals and worship, small groups, Nature hikes, fellowship time after worship, classes, movie nights, youth and children’s events
Music and worship	20	Great music and variety to appeal to all ages; Worship leadership of pastors strong; testimonies from congregation members inspiring
Biblical preaching	35	Good theology, calls us to love like Jesus, helps us come to know Jesus personally
Adult discipleship	28	Classes, Apprentice Immersion, small groups, Training series, Enlighten Up, etc.
Caring ministries	31	Care for the elderly, bereaved, ill, lonely, etc. Members can participate in caring. Tubbs fire support was amazing. Meals provided for those in need of them
Accepting all people / inclusive	15	“Our church accepts people as they are. This will help youth come to or stay in our church.” “Freedom and respect: there’s a spirit of unity here despite a wide diversity of theological views and the freedom to express them.”
Missions	11	We reach out in global missions areas. “We give care/love and support for those who need help in all parts of the world, as well as to our own local mission partners.”
Community Service	29	“Community service work (like the Nomadic Shelter, juvenile hall ministry and Angel Tree/Living Room) shows how we give grace to all.”
Social Justice	9	“Our community engagement and social justice efforts have been helpful in pushing us to love like Jesus.”

Summary of Responses to All Church Survey Question 2:

Our vision for First Presbyterian Church of Santa Rosa is: “A Place to Belong, Believe and Love Like Jesus”. In what ways can we better live out our vision?

122 responses

Topic	# of responses	Feedback
More focus on youth and young adults/families	17	Start sports program; advertise youth/family centered events; more focus on diversity, contemporary issues, integrate pre-school families more, etc
Outreach for church growth	20	Advertise, more relevant programming for younger people, no growth additional specificity in comments
More community service opportunities	9	Diversity of opportunities, better communication about them, more transparency/inclusion in planning, etc
More small groups/classes	11	Different hours, more of them, geared toward new believers, etc
Need more bridging of differences (age, socio/political, race/ethnicity)	23	Less/more focus on social justice, increase diversity of our membership, consider hiring pastor of color, more open acceptance of LGBTQI, more acceptance of conservative views, challenges re: age divide, etc
More/better welcoming and engagement activities	20	Long-timers need to look for visitors, include them in conversation, more intergenerational activities like One-Church, easier ways to get plugged in, need to staff Connect Center
Miscellaneous	22	More access to pastors (3), more inclusive choral director, more bible teaching, long-term vision needed, etc

Summary of Responses to All Church Survey Question 3:

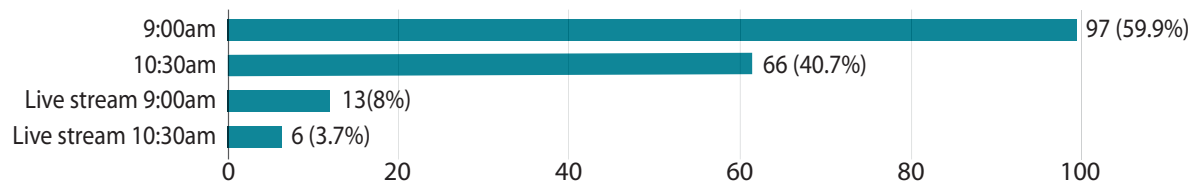
Is there anything else you'd like to share with us about your experience as a member of friend at FPC Santa Rosa?

95 responses

Topic	# of responses	Feedback
General	29	Love our church; grateful; feels like home
Pastors	6	Love Dale, Emily and Kent
Teaching	7	Like that it is biblically based; suggested topics include end times, forgiveness, Presbyterian views on the Lord's Supper
Caring Ministry	3	High praise for this ministry
Tech Improvements	4	Thankful for upgrades; anything more to help support vision/hearing impaired?
Social Justice / Political Leanings	6	Too much focus from the pulpit and classes on social justice and political leanings
Music	5	Prefer traditional @ 9 am; music is too quiet at 10:30
Worship	6	Too much of a "show", miss bulletins, clean up chancel, etc.
Hospitality / Getting Connected	5	Hard to connect; unwelcoming
Miscellaneous Comments	24	Various topics from Mother's Day lack of recognition, need to improve look of building, concerns re: future, not hosting BSF,

Which worship service do you usually attend?

162 responses





First Presbyterian Church of Santa Rosa

www.fpcsantarosa.org